News release

New satellite era takes off

20 October 2006

The revolutionary weather and climate satellite MetOp was launched from Baikonur, Kazakhstan on Thursday night and is the first ever European meteorological polar-orbiting satellite.

After a series of stringent equipment checks over the coming weeks, operational data will begin to flow into EUMETSAT's headquarters in Darmstadt before being sent to weather services across Europe, including the Met Office here in the UK.

New on-board technology will enable us over time to improve both our weather forecasts and our monitoring of climate change, with more accurate readings of winds, temperature and humidity, and our monitoring of greenhouse gases responsible for climate change.

The MetOp satellite launch was also a landmark occasion for space relations between Europe and the United States. This international partnership between EUMETSAT and NOAA will sustain continuity for polar-orbiting satellite imagery.

Dick Francis of the Met Office satellite team said; "this is easily the most significant satellite launch in my 25 years of working in the science. The advances this launch will bring to monitoring weather and climate will be enormous."

EUMETSAT

European Space Agency MetOp web site

British National Space Centre

Notes:

- EUMETSAT is an intergovernmental organisation that provides satellite data services to the Met Office and other European Met Offices and is a partner in a number of global climate monitoring and other initiatives.
- EUMETSAT is funded by the national meteorological services of Europe with the UK being the second largest contributor.
- The United States has delivered meteorological data from polar orbit, free of charge, to users worldwide for almost 40 years. MetOp represents Europe's contribution to a new co-operative venture which will secure this weather data service for the decades to come.
- Polar-orbiting weather satellites are complementary to those in geostationary orbit. They orbit at a lower altitude – typically 800 km compared with 35, 000 km for a geostationary satellite – and can, therefore, observe the Earth in closer detail.
- The UK's contribution to the development of MetOp was funded principally by DTI and MOD. The Met Office is responsible for UK involvement in the EUMETSAT component, which includes the build of the remaining two satellites in the series, ground segment facilities and operations. UK civil space activities are co-ordinated by British National Space Centre (BNSC).

For further information:
Met Office Press Office +44 (0)1392 886655
E-mail: pressoffice@metoffice.gov.uk

Met Office Customer Centre 0870 900 0100
If you're outside the UK +44 (0)1392 885680

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